1: Cohen E-4,5 (1956-1965) 1967 MS14 Kanuri MS14

to seniors, first in the household then in the society at large, that is the most important social learning of childhood. Kanuri society is hierarchical. Whether the person is in one compound or another, one social situation or another, there is always one common feature—rank and its determinants, power and authority. By living in several compounds, by seeing authority at work in the community, and by learning to generalize his response to authority, the young child learns to respond easily and gracefully to many combinations of rank and position. His counterpart in western society may be learning how to cope with the intricacies of modern urban technology, but he would certainly be no match for his Kanuri counterpart in the diplomacy necessary in dealing with superiors.

Puberty

Puberty is not an age-grade in the same sense as childhood or adolesence. Yet it deserves some special attention because it is a marker that separates these two life periods and creates a means for very important transitions especially for young girls. Sometime between the age of twelve and fourteen most girls undergo their first marriage. Boys on the other hand begin their adolescence. This is a more carefree time for them than the period of intense training for adulthood that a girl is suddenly confronted with as she moves from childhood into her teenage period and marriage.

However there are no absolutely sharp breaks even for a girl. A newly married young girl is not considered totally grown-up and sometimes she continues to wear her hair in the childhood style. If she divorces during this early period, usually the first three or four years after her first marriage, people often speak of her as *njim suri* or one who is only beginning to become a woman but who has not completed the change-over to full adultlhood.[1] At first the young wife still sees many unmarried childhood friends who will soon be getting married themselves. They visit her when she is confined to the house for varying periods depending upon how secluded her husband wishes his wife to be. Only gradually over the period of the first year or so of marriage does the young girl begin to participate fully as a wife. From the first she cooks food regularly because it is her duty and her right, and as time goes on she is seen more and more in the company of the older, adult women of the compound and the neighborhood. If she is not in total seclusion, like most rural wives, then she can be seen going with the women to the well or the market, and to women's festivities in the village.

Although rare it sometimes happens that a girl misses the opportunity to marry while still in her early teens. Leaving aside the very few girls who go on in school, such cases are rather tragic. The girl is either mentally deficient or a disturbed person, or one who people say has been having love affairs before marriage. In such cases she changes her hair style in her middle to late teens and takes on the role of a single divorced woman seeking a new husband and therefore open to courtship and sexual liaisons with men.

In Magumeri one young girl about fifteen or sixteen who was well de-

[1] Literally *njim suri* means to have seen inside the hut, that is she has been alone with her husband but only seen or glimpsed at the activities of adulthood not really practiced them in full.

1: Cohen E-4,5 (1956-1965) 1967 MS14 Kanuri MS14

veloped physically had not yet married. There were many rumors and much gossip to the effect that she was no longer a virgin and that men of the town slept with her. Her father, it was said, would have a hard time arranging her first marriage. The girl herself seemed to be suffering increasingly from her inability to see herself in the role of a child awaiting marriage instead of that of a developing young matron—the role now common among her young age mates. Thus in order to take up a normal position in society, girls are supposed to have their first marriages in and around the time of puberty. Failure to do so indicates a deviant and degrading development. This is the reason why almost all Bornu men say that girls who go on in the educational system are "spoiled" and should never be allowed to stay in school beyond the traditional age of marriage. The girls in school see the matter differently; the situation remains today one of tension, with the majority against education for girls, and the schools themselves looking for students and preaching a somewhat different attitude toward a girl's adolescence than that held traditionally by the people.

Another point should also be noted. Most girls have very little choice, if any, in their first marriage arrangements. If they are very drastically opposed to the union, their views are considered since parents are afraid they might behave badly as young wives. However they are traditionally supposed to respect the wishes of their parents and comply with their demands. Indeed many Kanuri, both men and women, know very little about their first marriage arrangements at all since these are almost entirely made by their parents or the head of the compound they are living in at the time. It should also be realized that many Kanuri girls marry for the first time with men sometimes as much as two, three, and even four times their own age which enhances the traditional seniority of the husband as well as taking any "romance" out of it for the girls.

Sometime around the end of childhood and into the beginning of the teenage period young boys are circumcized. This event is fundamentally a ceremonial occasion and is thus related only in a rough general way to the actual onset of puberty for each boy. Generally speaking boys are cut in groups, although in rural areas it is not uncommon to see a family performing the ceremony for just one boy in the household. On the other hand circumcision among high-ranking people such as village heads, district heads, members of the royal family, or rich traders in the city attracts many other families who try to have their own children cut at the same time to participate in the large festivities. Usually the higher the rank of the leading families involved in a circumcision the greater the number of boys who are likely to be cut at the same time.

The important thing is not the readiness of the boy. Rather it is the auspiciousness of the occasion in terms of the family's relationship to the rest of the community. Is there a large circumcision taking place this year? Are a large number of friends and relatives asking when little Abba Gana is going to be circumcized? Have the household members, especially the household head, attended a great many marriage or naming ceremonies? Have other community members been given gifts on these occasions? Is it not time to reap the benefit of all this participation by having a ceremony of one's own to which many people will come and bring gifts of food, clothing, and money for the family and the boy? These and similar questions are the determining factors in the timing of the circumcision ceremony, and

1: Cohen E-4,5 (1956-1965) 1967 MS14 Kanuri MS14

they point to the major functions of the event. Certainly it marks publicly the opening of the gates on the road to manhood for the young man, but, much more importantly, it validates, strengthens and dramatizes the relational network of ties that the family and the household maintain and attempt to promote in the society.

At some of the larger ceremonies, especially those held by the high-ranking households in Bornu, there is often a small group of recent converts who ask to join the ceremony in order to mark their religious conversion and obtain full membership in Kanuri society. In one very large circumcision we saw forty-seven boys from high status households and ten Cameroon pagans ranging in age from fifteen to thirty-five. These latter seemed completely ecstatic to have been accepted at the ceremony and were the subject of much ribald joking by the Kanuri participants. However they now had an easier access to Kanuri women as wives and sweethearts, and it is conceivable that when they do in fact marry Kanuri women they and their descendants will eventually be absorbed into Kanuri society. Thus the circumcision ceremony is one of the important gateways into society for non-Moslems from the small tribes surrounding Bornu on its southern and southeastern borders.

As in many cultures around the world, the Kanuri themselves regard the circumcision ceremony as a mark of approaching manhood, and even though the boys are often quite young the ceremony still dramatizes their adult or approaching adult status. Thus after the boys have come out of confinement during which the cut heals, they are given whips which they brandish while chasing and threatening the young girls. The girls must "buy off" such treatment by giving the young boy a few pennies. This ritual was left unexplained by informants who answered questions about its meaning by saying, "We do this because it is our custom." However, it seems likely that it is a symbolic reference to the achievement of manhood or potential manhood. It symbolizes through ritual the cultural value of male dominance which the boys must now begin to practice as they prepare to join the ranks of adult men. The "buying off" of the beating by the little girls can be interpreted to reflect the flexibility of female submissiveness; a woman must behave submissively towards a man but she has levers to gain her own rights and wishes in her relationships with men.

Adolescence

As we have seen, there is an extra age-grade period for boys which lasts from around the time of circumcision to their first marriage between the ages of eighteen and twenty-five. At first the young man is still thought of as a small boy, but as he advances into middle and late teenage years he becomes more of a *zairo*—that is to say, a young bachelor. He associates in his free time with other young men his age and begins to gossip about trade, politics, and nocturnal adventures with women. Young boys generally obtain their first sexual experience in their mid to late teenage period from divorced women who are often older than themselves. In their later teens and early twenties they begin to have more serious love affairs of longer duration with young divorced women who may turn out to be their future wives if their first marriages are not already arranged by their parents.

Sitting and listening to a group of these young men discussing matters of

1: Cohen E-4,5 (1956-1965) 1967 MS14 Kanuri MS14

Sitting and listening to a group of these young men discussing matters of interest one is struck by the similarities and the differences in their lives as compared to similar groups in western society. Like young men everywhere they discussed the merits of various occupations, the economic returns, the power and prestige to be gained from one or the other type of job, and so on. Unlike their counterparts in western society, they also spend a great deal of time discussing the qualities of "the big men" in Bornu and the benefits received by loyal followers of these men. They are keenly aware, or try to be, of whose fortunes are rising and falling among the big men and listen with great interest to some new tidbit of information to this effect. Like their counterparts elsewhere teenagers learn to smoke cigarettes, gamble, and drink alcoholic beverages during this period. School boys also learn western table manners and take periodic meals in the places that serve western style food.

One of the most important features of a Kanuri boy's adolescence is his choice of training for an occupation. All young boys learn the fundamentals of farming in the households of their youth since almost all compound heads in Bornu, except some in the city, have farms. In some rural villages boys will learn nothing else but farming and probably remain farmers all their lives. On the other hand the majority of Kanuri boys learn another occupation which they will practice during the dry season or the non-farming season. For most boys the choice is determined ahead of time by the elders of the household, or by the economic specializations in their own vicinity. For example, one boy whose father is a salt retailer and who lives with his father in the ward of the dyers has been apprenticed by his father to one of the dyer households. In general boys are expected to take up the occupation of their fathers unless they or their parents have strong desires and an opportunity to do something else. There is much evidence to show that in making the decision the wishes of the young boys were taken into account. Thus one young man remarked that he would never comply with his father's desire that he become a butcher. Instead he started to work with his father's younger brother in the nearby compound and is learning to be a trader in hides and skins. Today a large range of new occupations is opening up; modernization has served to accelerate this degree of freedom simply because there are many more occupations and a wider range of potential income.

Kanuri occupations other than farming usually involve some apprenticeship, especially for young boys. Such training varies with the kind of job being learned, with the age of the boy, and with the nature of the relationship between the boy and the man teaching him the occupation. If an occupation has a higher status or there is an expectation of high income or prestige associated with it, the person doing an apprenticeship must expect a longer training period in return for having been admitted into an advantageous position. Thus truck drivers who make a comparatively high income demand a fee besides three to five years of service from the person taken on as an apprentice. Butchers occupy a low-status position in the society, but they can also earn fairly good incomes and therefore they, too, claim longer than usual apprenticeship. As the boy becomes older, it is expected that his training period will become shorter, whereas the earlier an apprenticeship is begun, the longer the education. This simply reflects Kanuri recognition of the more rapid learning that comes with age.

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The terms of the relationship are dictated by the boy and his immediate family or compound head, on the one hand, and the master instructor on the other. If there is a recognized kinship link between the boy and his future teacher and the compound head, then arrangements are much looser than if this is not the case. In the latter situation there is generally hard bargaining over the terms of the relationship. In general the boy must live in the master's house for a stipulated period helping with all the work of the household, the farming, bringing grass for the horse if there is one, running messages, and helping in the occupational specialization of his master. He is a *tada njima,* or son of the house, and refers to his new household head as *abba njima,* or father of the house. He is supposed to act in the situation in the same way as a son acts towards his father. If the master is already a relative, he refers to the apprentice by the appropriate kin term in the manner laid out for such relationships within the culture, although he has added authority in this particular situation. Arrangements in such cases are often made early in the boy's life and last longer, coming closer in effect to a true adoption. A number of men reported having difficulty ending such relationships when they wish to go out on their own, especially when the master is also related by kinship to the apprentice. On the other hand, all Kanuri accept subordination as the means to valued ends. The following case will give some idea of the details involved in such a relationship.

A young barber apprentice of about nineteen or twenty years of age had previously been apprenticed to a seller of kola nuts. However he decided to give it up because it entailed the constant giving of credit to his customers and he never seemed able to collect all the money owed to him. His full brother in Maiduguri who had been his wholesale supplier advised him to return to their home town and become a barber. The older brother claimed that it was a good occupation and furthermore one of the barbers back in Magumeri needed an apprentice since his own son was as yet too young to help in the work. The young boy returned to Magumeri to ask the barber about it and then completed his own arrangements for the apprenticeship. He moved into the barber's compound for one year and became his apprentice. He could visit the compound in which his mother lived and attend his own farm plots. But he had to cultivate the barber's land, gather grass for the horse, carry water now and then, and be ready at all times to run messages for his *abba njima.* The barber taught him how to shave heads and cup blood (for medicinal purposes), and gave him a barber's bag of tools with which he began working sometimes with his master, sometimes alone.[3] By rights all the proceeds earned during that year were supposed to be given to the master barber. Naturally he pocketed an occasional fee but not too often; to do so would have been to risk his mentor's dissatisfaction and also his projected career as a barber. The senior could, had he felt the boy to be completely unsatisfactory, dismiss him and take back the barber's tools. The barber clothed and fed him and gave him a little spending money regularly during that first year. At special events such as naming ceremonies he was given a small tip by the household head because of his role as the barber's apprentice. This he kept for himself. In 1957 he moved into the compound occupied by his mother in Magumeri. He still considers himself a *tada njima* of the

[3] Like many peoples of West Africa, the wider Islamic world, and even Europe not so long ago, the Kanuri believe that taking out a little blood can rid a person of various ailments. They do this by making a few shallow incisions, then sucking the blood into a cattle horn.

1: Cohen E-4,5 (1956-1965) 1967 MS14 Kanuri MS14

barber and still carries out special chores for his former master. He also claims that he gives the senior barber about fifty percent of all his present receipts. As yet he does not know how to cut face marks, remove the uvula, or perform circumcisions, and so he attends all of these ceremonies with the master barber so that he may continue his education. He hopes that by the next year he will be allowed to perform some of these more advanced operations under supervision. When he has completely finished his education, it will not be necessary to do any chores for the senior or give him any commission. Nevertheless the former apprentice should always pay his respects to his ex-master and give him gifts from time to time.

Other apprentices living with strangers claimed they felt more freedom in the household of the stranger and thus live away from home for their training even though they practice the same craft as their father. Many said that they would return home eventually but for the present it was pleasant to travel around seeing other parts of Bornu. This freedom refers more specifically to their sexual activity or at least to its discussion since the discipline and respect given to the compound head is the same as elsewhere. However many boys discussed sex in front of the compound head while such behavior would be impossible in their natal family households. Some boys reported that their father was dead and they had been sent off by their families to the household of relatives or friends in order to learn an occupation.

In summary, adolsecence sharply divides men and women. A young girl takes on her role as a married woman and it is within marriage that she completes her education for adulthood in Kanuri society. A woman may divorce later on as indeed most do, then remarry and bear children throughout. However the framework of adult life is entered into at a first marriage sometime around puberty. For the boy, on the other hand, adolescence is a socially recognized state in life entered at circumcision. This stage of life is used to complete the young man's education and equip him with the interpersonal and occupational skills that are required as an adult and a potential family head.

Maturity

The mature man is described by the Kanuri as *rashidi*. Ideally this implies that he is married, has a compound of his own and an occupation, the use of some land for farming, and a recognized position in the community as the head of a compound. It also means that he has a certain degree of independence so that if he wished he could move of his own accord to another community. To be a mature man par excellence, he should also have children and the reputation of a person who does things discreetly and diplomatically. Maturity is not simply a term applied to a period of life. It is also a value judgement describing a proper and desirable behavior of an adult man. It is not just a role but an evaluation of that role.

Most people seemed unable or unwilling to answer the question of age in relation to maturity, and so they fell back on marriage claiming that any married man was in fact a mature adult. However a few, notably high ranking people, did give an age and suggested that a person could not be thought of as being fully mature until he was at least thirty-five, very often forty. After this age he is not sup-

882 lack of achieved skill in some area of behaviour. This extension of the term for child into adolescence must not be mistaken for the European cultural trait of confusing childhood and adulthood in the adolescent period. It refers not just to a lack of skill, but more generally to a lack of power and authority, and in this sense can be utilised to describe anyone until he is an old man. In this context the term is applied to mean that in some particular manner the person is *like* a small boy in relation to others around him, i.e. he must defer to them. People do not find this unnatural and even middle aged men may refer to themselves as *tada gana* (small boy).(1)

883 From the time of true physiological puberty onward, the boy associates more and more with other young *zairo* and takes part more or less freely in the banter of age-mates, and those slightly older. These young boys go to markets, play together, discuss local gossip and politics, and often joke about possible and actual nocturnal [833] adventures with women. On this last point, boys generally receive their first sexual experiences after puberty from divorced women who may vary in age anywhere from fifteen to fifty. More often that not, it is reported that the first experiences are with older women because of the competition for the younger sexually accessible females, (i.e. those who are divorced). Like young men everywhere they discuss the merits of various occupations, the desirability of rural or urban life, but also speak to one another at great length about the qualities of various "big men" (*kam kura*) in Bornu, and the benefits received by their followers. Today, boys also learn to smoke cigarettes, gamble and to drink intoxicating liquors during this period.

882 463 A primary function of this age status for adolescent boys

(1) See below, p. 174.